

For the Children

HABIT.

Habit at first is but a silken thread,
 Fine as the light-winged gossamers that sway
 In the warm sunbeams of a summer's day;
 A shallow streamlet, rippling o'er its bed;
 A tiny sapling, ere its roots are spread;
 A yet unhardened thorn upon the spray;
 A lion's whelp that hath not scented prey;
 A little smiling child obedient led.
 Beware! that thread may bind thee as a chain;
 That streamlet gather to a fatal sea;
 That sapling spread into a gnarled tree;
 That thorn, grown hard, may wound and give thee pain;
 That playful whelp his murderous fangs reveal;
 That child, a giant, crush thee 'neath his heel.

—Selected.

THE TWENTIETH HUNDRED.

By Mary Katherine Reely.

Elsie Darwin came skipping home from school. Mother always said that when Elsie came skipping down the street, she knew that something nice had happened to her. Something nice had happened today, and it had made Elsie feel very happy. So she skipped, and as she skipped she sang a little song.

It was an old, old tune which she sang, but no one else had ever heard the words, for she had made them up herself. She hummed them very softly under her breath:

"I got a hundred, I got a hundred,
 I got a hundred in spelling today."

It was not the first day Elsie had stood one hundred in spelling. Not at all. Indeed, she had had one hundred just seventeen times that month, and now there were only three more days to spell. If she could have one hundred three more times, her name would go on the honor roll. Then think of the joy of showing father her report card!

So Elsie skipped and sang her little song, "I got a hundred, I got a hundred," till she reached home and could tell mother. Of course it would have been nice to surprise mother, too, but a little girl must have some one to talk things over with.

The next day was Wednesday, and Elsie skipped home from school that afternoon. The next day was Thursday, and again Elsie skipped.

"Now, there is only one more day, mother," she said, "and I can surely get just one more. And won't father be surprised? And won't he be proud of me?"

Every one in school was excited that Friday afternoon. The girls talked it over at recess. There were three girls in the class who had nineteen hundreds: Sadie Clark, Mabel Deland and Elsie.

"You girls needn't be so sure," Lucy Case said. "You may make mistakes today. I was sure, too, when I had fifteen hundreds. I thought I could get five more, but I made a mistake that very day."

"Oh, but we won't make mistakes," said Sadie. "Will we, Elsie?"

"We will study just as hard till we know every word, won't we, Sadie?"

"Of course we will," said Sadie.

Spelling class came just before school closed. Elsie could hardly sit still in her seat. Her little song kept running through her head. She was almost afraid she would sing it aloud.

"I'll get a hundred, I'll get a hundred,
 I'll get my twentieth hundred today."

This is what she sang to herself now.

"Only three more words to write," she thought. Her feet were tapping up and down under her seat, keeping time to the song.

Miss Morris pronounced the eighteenth word, "Deceive."

"Oh, dear!" thought Elsie. "One of those horrid 'ie' words that I could never spell. But I know this one today." She wrote it down.

Then there were two words more and it was time to change papers. Elsie smiled at Sadie as they exchanged, and Sadie smiled back at Elsie. The smiles meant that each little girl was sure.

Mabel Deland was asked to spell. Just as she began Elsie gave a quick glance down Sadie's column of words.

Yes, they were just like hers. No! Were they, after all? Elsie was looking at the eighteenth word. It did not look right.

"Decei—decie"—she said quickly to herself. Sadie had "ei." Can she be right?" she thought.

And then the awful truth came to her. Sadie was right. She was wrong! Mabel was spelling and Elsie must try to follow her. And, oh, whatever she did she must not cry!

Elsie marked 100 at the top of Sadie's paper and gave it back to her. She tried to be brave and smile at Sadie, but it was hard to make the smile come. Sadie smiled back at her, however, as if everything were all right.

Elsie took her paper. She looked first at the eighteenth word. What had happened to it? It looked right now!

Then she understood. Sadie had made the littlest mark with her pencil, so that the i was turned into an e. The dot was just half way between the two letters. And no one need ever know. And there at the top of her paper was the big one hundred mark.

"It is what I have worked for a whole month," Elsie thought. "And I can't bear to fail at the very end."

So when Sadie and the others stood, Elsie stood with them. But when Miss Morris praised them for their good work, Elsie did not feel as glad about it as she had expected to.

She didn't feel like singing her little song, either. Instead she kept thinking the word she had mis-spelled—"Deceive, deceive"; she could think of nothing else.

"Is there a commandment that says, 'Thou shalt not deceive?'" she wondered. She didn't believe there was, but it sounded like one.

Elsie slipped away from the other girls when school was out, and started home alone. She didn't skip at all tonight.

"I don't care," she said to herself. "I worked hard all the month, and now my name is on the roll, anyway, and I can tell father."

This is what Elsie tried very hard to say to herself.